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BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL
115
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ON THE PERFECTION OF ANATOMY: 4 OF 6
EAGLE AWARDS 2006 WINNER
HIROAKI SAMURA
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OF THE IMMORTAL
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BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

art and story by

HIROAKI SAMURA

translation by DANA LEWIS

lettering and retouch by TOMOKO SAITO

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MANJI

Immortal *rōnin*, vowed to protect Rin and aid her in her quest for revenge

RIN

Last heir of the Mutenichi *ryū dōjō* destroyed by the Hiō-*ryū*.

HABAKI KAGIMURA

Powerful *bangashira*, serving the shogun and seeking the secret of immortality

BURANDO

Deranged medical examiner, saved from prison by Kagimura

DEWANOSUKE

Manji's former cellmate

YAMADA ASAEMON

Nicknamed "Kubikiri Asa," the shogun's executioner is an expert sword tester and a limb-cutting connoisseur

THE STORY SO FAR

Infected by *kessen-chu*, mystical bloodworms which can heal all wounds and grant their host immortality, Manji's bloodthirst led to the capture and murder of his sister. To atone for this and for the 100 innocent people who died at his hand while he served a corrupt lord, Manji vowed to slay 1,000 evil men in exchange for the release of death.

Lured to Kagimura's *bakufu* stronghold near Edo Castle, Manji is ambushed, overwhelmed, and imprisoned in an underground cell. Seeking to impart the powers of the *kessen-chu* to another human, Kagimura orders his medical examiners to discover the secrets of Manji's regenerative abilities. Crazed surgeon Ayame Burando seems to make some progress, but his star patient, Dewanosuke, dies after being run through by Kagimura's sword.

designers DEBRA BAILEY and SCOTT COOK editor PHILIP SIMON

publisher MIKE RICHARDSON

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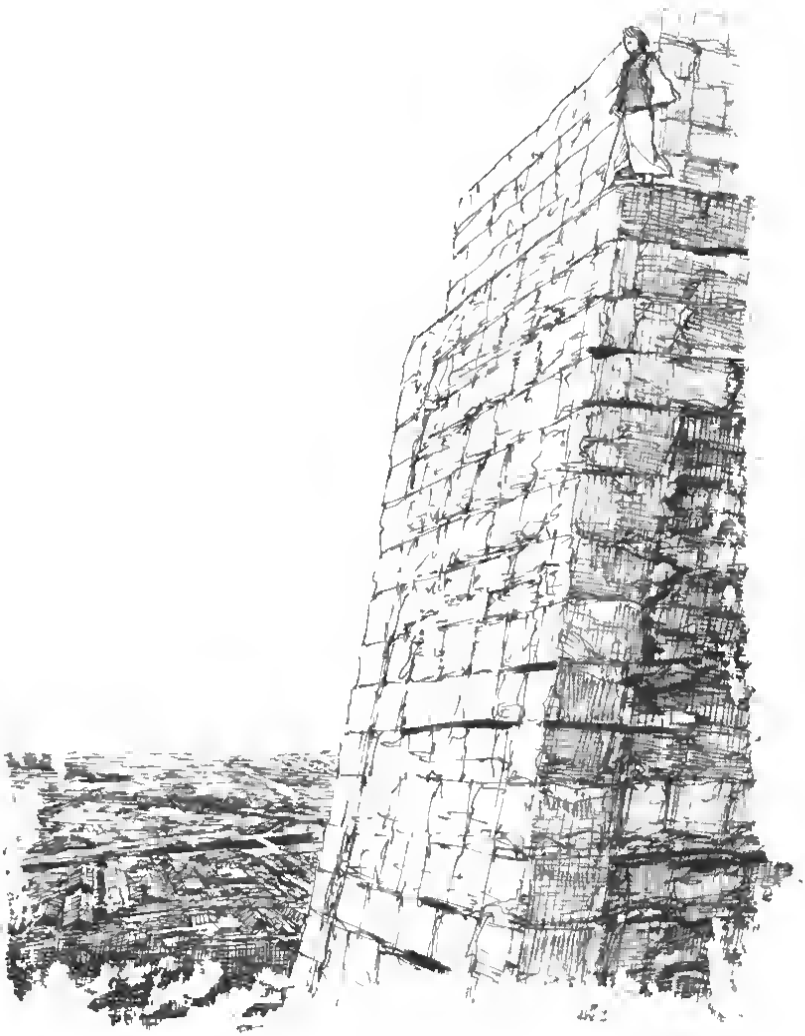
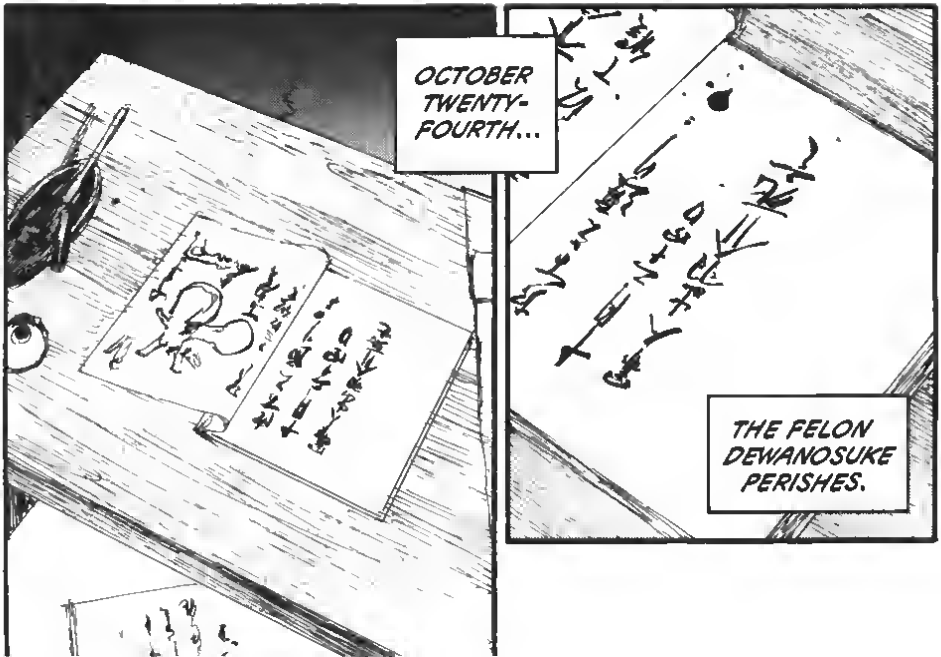
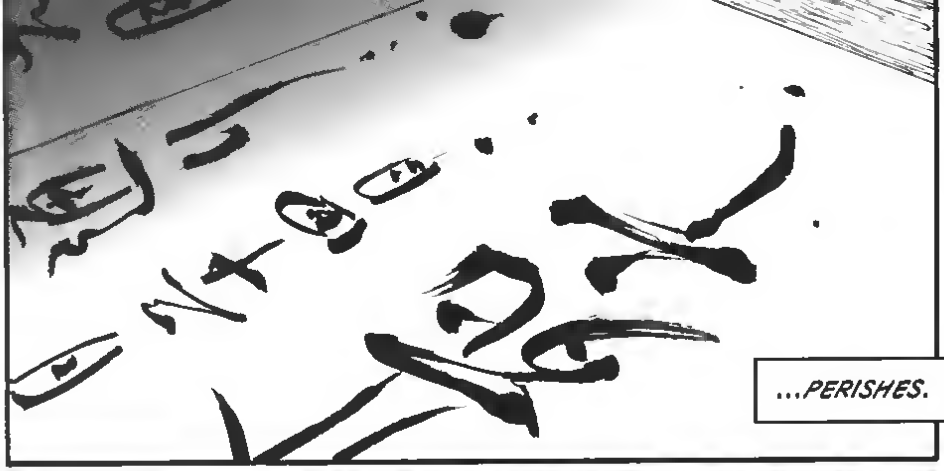
無限の住人

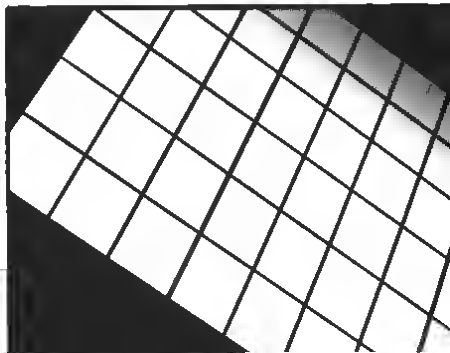


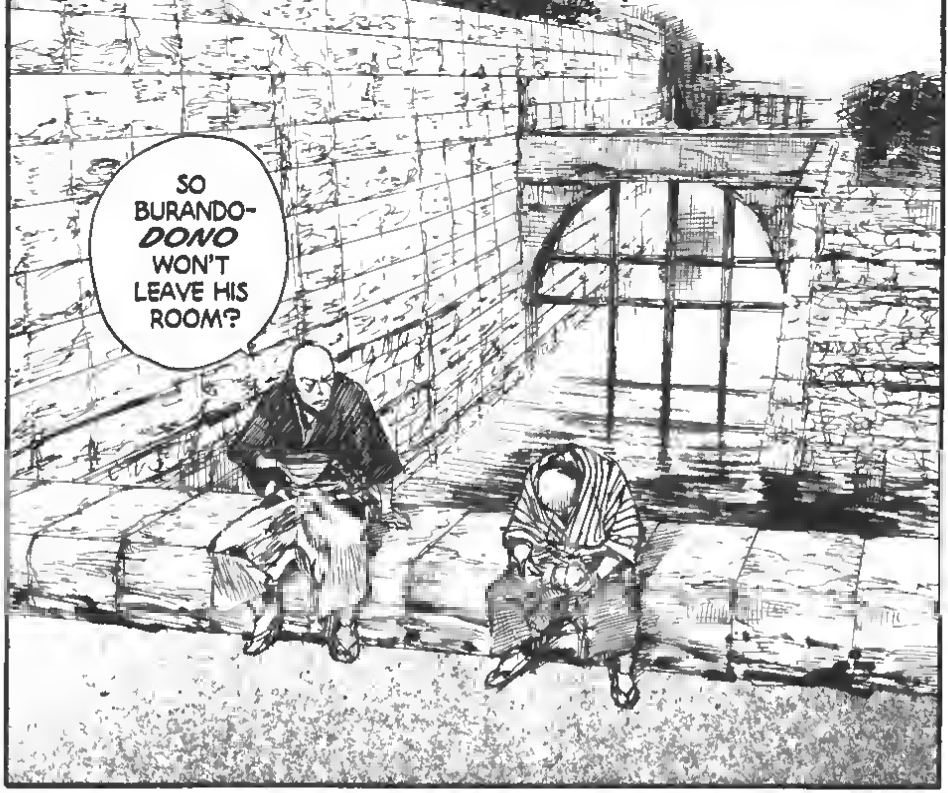
ON THE PERFECTION OF ANATOMY

-part four-


OCTOBER TWENTY-FOURTH...
THE FELON DEWANOSUKE PERISHES.

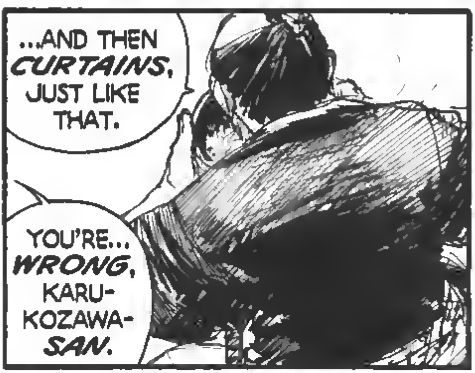

...PERISHES.




SO BURANDO-*DONO* WON'T LEAVE HIS ROOM?

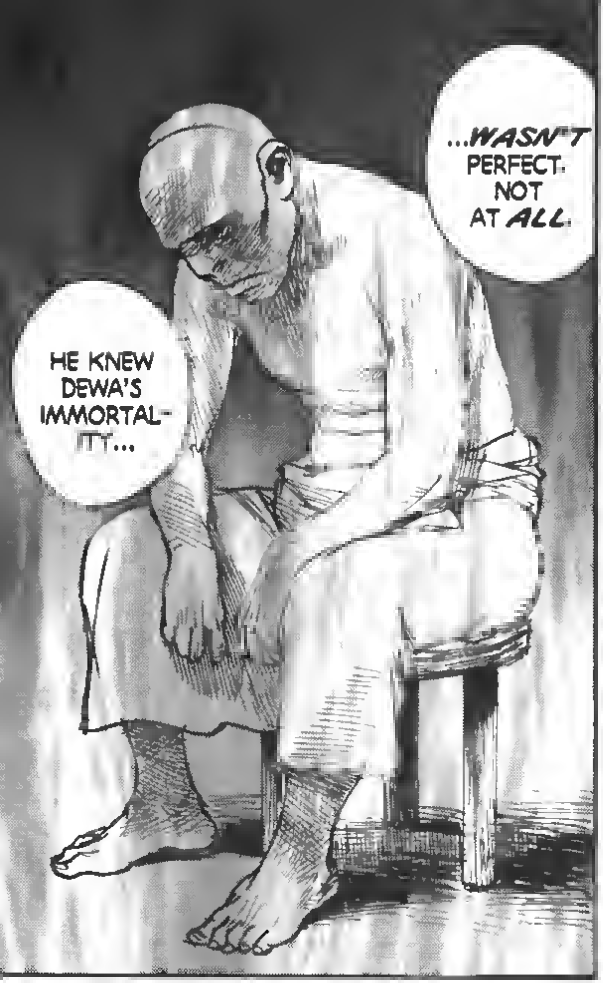
THAT'S RIGHT.

WELL, CAN'T BLAME HIM.
TWENTY DAYS OF PREP...


...AND THEN *CURTAINS*, JUST LIKE THAT.
YOU'RE... *WRONG*, KARU-KOZAWA-*SAN*.

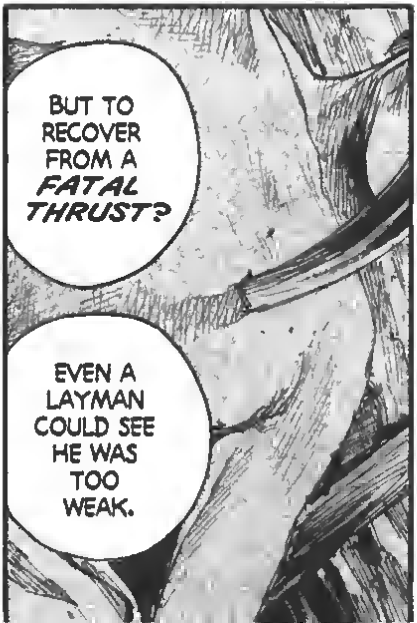
I SPOKE WITH HIM YESTERDAY, THROUGH THE *FUSAMA*.

"DO YOU SAY 'WAIT,' NOW, BECAUSE YOU LACK *CONFI-DENCE*?
"I, TOO, COULD HAVE SECOND THOUGHTS...
"...ABOUT YOUR FUTURE, AS WELL."
AT THAT MOMENT, WITH THAT *THREAT*...
...ALL THE IMPATIENCE AND AMBITION HE'D PUSHED ASIDE...CAME RUSHING *BACK*.
HE SAID...
...HE *HATES* HIMSELF NOW...
...FOR CAVING IN TO THEM.
BURANDO-*DONO KNEW*.


...WASN'T PERFECT. NOT AT ALL.
HE KNEW DEWA'S IMMORTALITY...

"USE YOUR EYES! DOES THIS GUY LOOK IMMORTAL?!"

IN FACT... MANJI WAS RIGHT.
MAYBE A SHALLOW CUT, YES.


BUT TO RECOVER FROM A FATAL THRUST?
EVEN A LAYMAN COULD SEE HE WAS TOO WEAK.

BUT WE, WE--!

HMM.
LOOK, TORA-EMON...

SOONER OR LATER, HE WOULD'VE--
MAYBE SO... ...NO... PROBA-BLY SO.
...TESTS OR NO TESTS, IT WASN'T YOUR PLACE TO DECIDE.
BURANDO-DONO THOUGHT SO, TOO, AT FIRST.
TO HABAKI-DONO, DEWA WAS JUST A STEPPING STONE TO IMMORTAL-ITY.
...AND NOW WE SHOULD BE USING HIS DEATH TO MOVE US EVEN ONE STEP CLOSER TO AN ANSWER.
WE KNEW WE MIGHT KILL HIM...
YOU CAN START OFF THINKING THAT WAY...
THAT'S EASY TO SAY.
BUT KARU-KOZAWA-SAN!

...BUT ONCE YOU'RE INVOLV-ED...
...IT'S DOCTOR AND PATIENT.

BURANDO-DONO'S... TORTURED.
AS A SCIENTIST, HE ACHIEVED NOTHING.

AS A DOC-TOR...
...HE LOST HIS PATIENT.

"AND FROM NOW ON...
"...HE'LL HAVE TO CHOOSE. AGAIN AND AGAIN..."

...HEY!!
GIMME A BREAK!
IT'S BEEN THREE DAYS.
WHERE'S BURANDO?!
IF HE'S THROWN IN THE TOWEL...
...LET ME THE HELL OUTTA HERE!
DON'T KNOW ABOUT BURANDO-DONO...

HE'S BRINGING IN A NEW GUY.
...BUT HABAKI-DONO...?

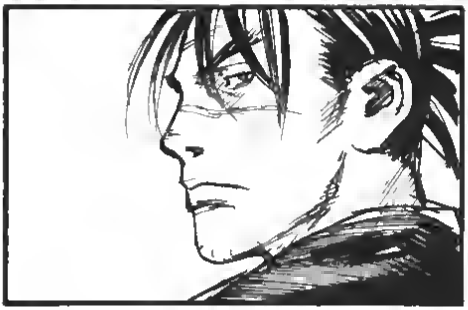
SHIFT'S OVER. GIMME THE KEY.
SURE.

SO HE'S THE NEXT CORPSE?

THIS ISN'T ABOUT KILLING--
HAH! AIN'T *THAT* RICH.
FROM THE GUY WHO SKEWERED DEWA.

IF THAT SIGHT OFFENDED YOU, JUST RECALL...
...WHERE TO FIND THE CRONE WHO TRANS-FORMED YOU.
YOU!
DRAG BURANDO DOWN HERE.
TO... PARTNERS IN CRIME?
NAME'S KURIFU. GOOD TO KNOW YOU.

COLD SHOULDER, HUH?



...TELL ME.
YOU GOT ANY IDEA...
...WHY YOU'RE HERE?

AH! SURE DO! AN EXPERI-MENT...
...RIGHT?

BUT, HEY! I HEAR YOU DID.
THAT'S CRAZY TALK.
NAW. IT'S NOT.

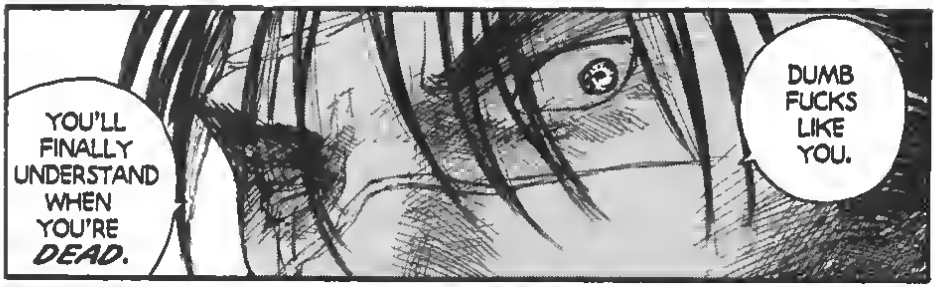
ARE YOU STUPID?! THAT'S CRAP!
NO ONE TURNS IMMOR-TAL!
TO MAKE ME IMMOR-TAL.

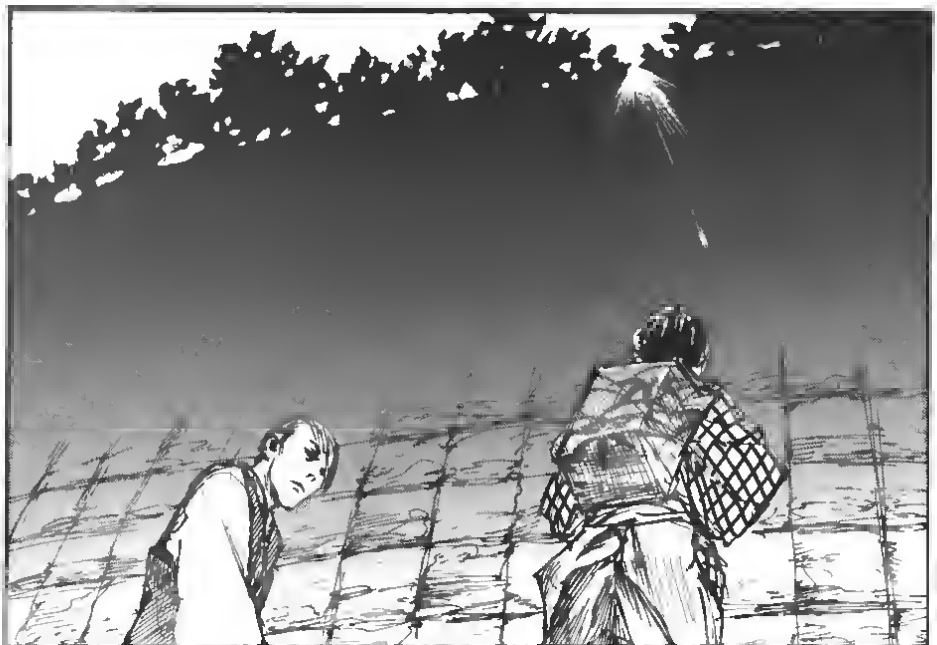
SEE, I HAD A PAL IN THE ITTŌ-RYŪ.
I KNEW THE MOMENT I SAW YOU.
I'VE HEARD ALL ABOUT YOU, MAN.
...YOU'RE ONE OF THEM?
NAW, I'M NO GOOD WITH SWORDS.
NOT THAT ONE'D DO ANY GOOD DOWN HERE.
STILL, NEVER THOUGHT I'D MEET THE REAL DEAL.
THE ONLY WIT-NESS...
...SO TO SPEAK...

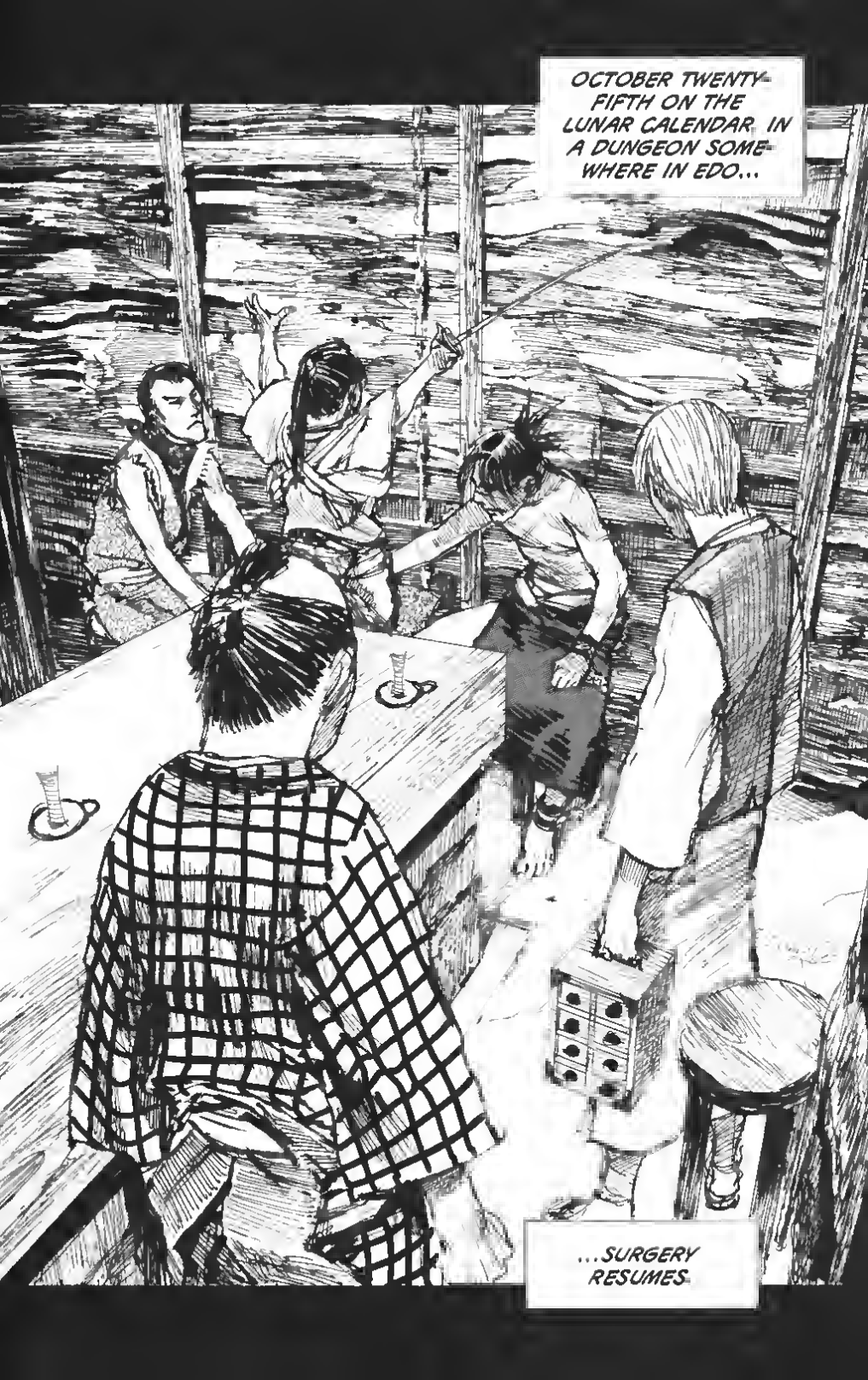
...THAT THIS ISN'T ALL JUST CRAZY TALK.
YOU WANT FLESH THAT WON'T DIE...?
WHO THE HELL WOULDN'T.
DUMB QUES-TION, MAN.
EVEN RISKING THE LIFE YOU HAVE?
OH-- MY BAD... YOU'RE FROM DEATH ROW, RIGHT?
ME?
HELL, NO. NOT ME!

THEY'D PICKED SOME OTHER DUDE IN OUR CELL.
SO I RAISED MY HAND, MAN.
A CRY-BABY!
"IF YOU'RE GONNA *EXPERIMENT* ON ME, *KILL ME* FIRST!"
I MEAN, *IMMORTALITY* RESEARCH?
WHAT A BLAST, *RIGHT?*

!
YOU...!
WHAT THE FUCK'RE YOU--?!
STAND DOWN!


YOU'LL FINALLY UNDERSTAND WHEN YOU'RE *DEAD*.
DUMB FUCKS LIKE YOU.

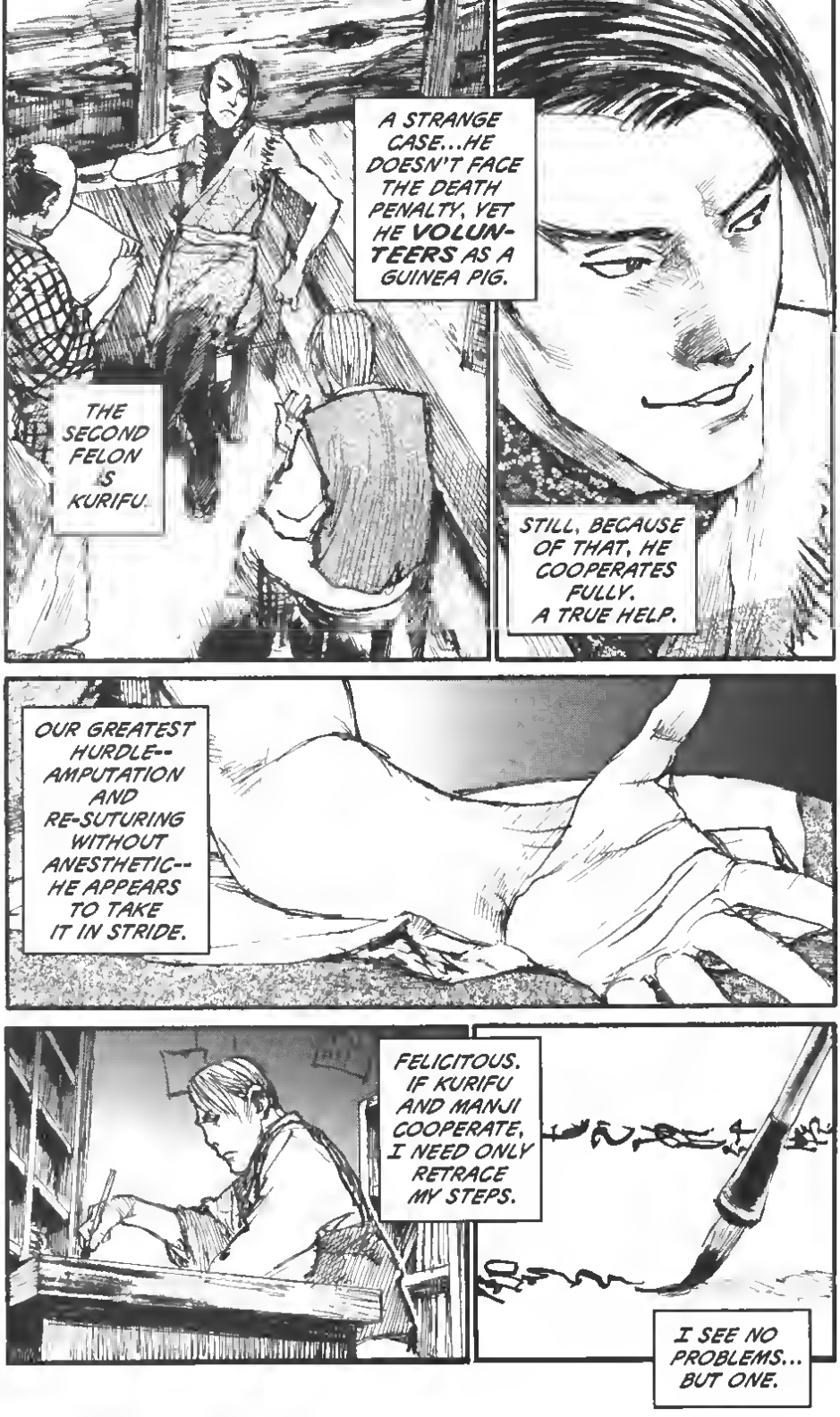



OCTOBER TWENTY-FIFTH ON THE LUNAR CALENDAR. IN A DUNGEON SOMEWHERE IN EDO...
...SURGERY RESUMES.

HRRRF
IS HE OFF IN THE HEAD...?

IT'S NOT GOOD TO LAMENT A FELON'S DEATH FOR LONG...

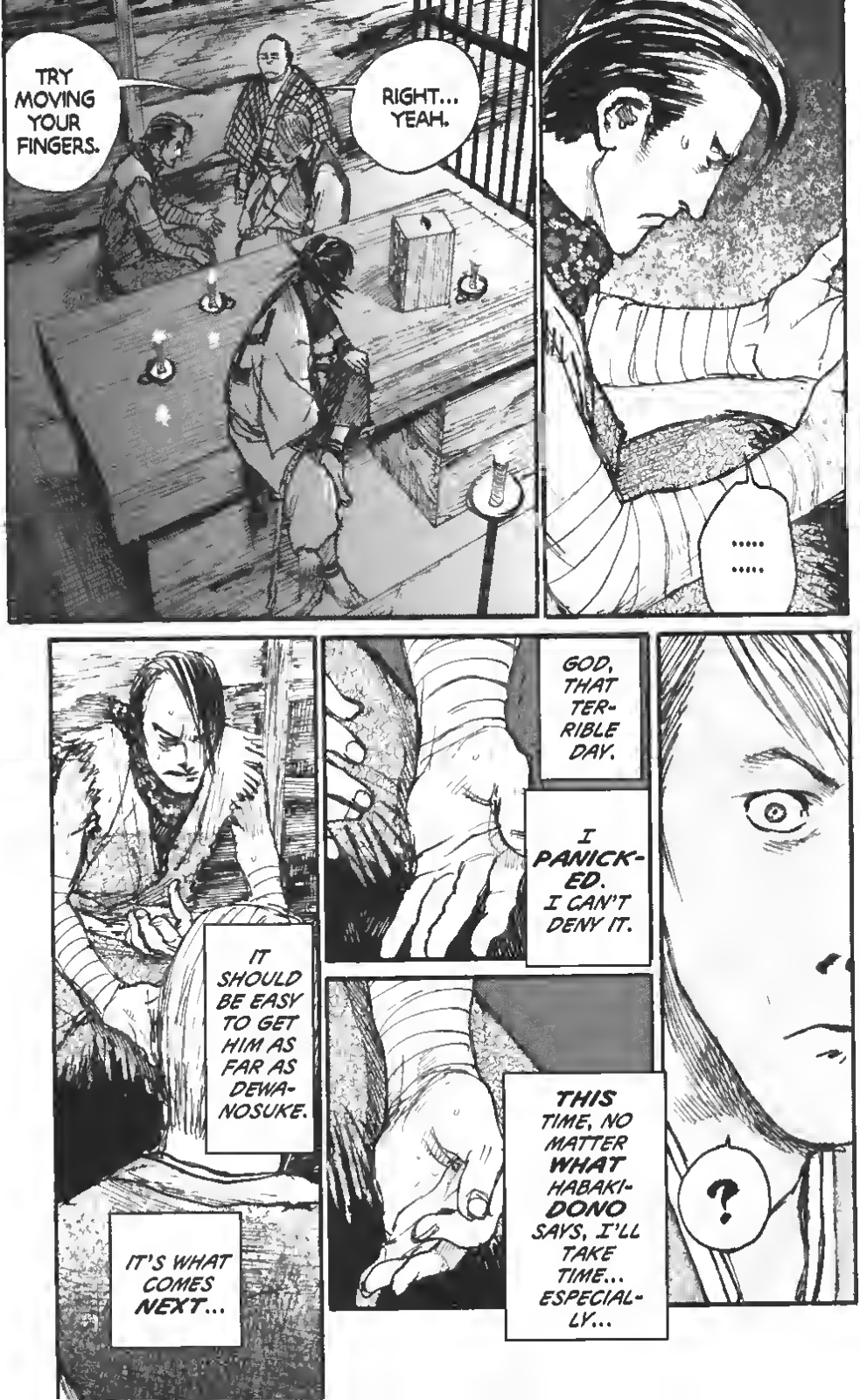
GRIEF. HESITATION. IF WE DOCTORS LET SUCH FEELINGS BIND OUR HANDS...
...THEN, DOWN HERE AT LEAST... THEIR DEATHS WILL BE IN VAIN.


A STRANGE CASE...HE DOESN'T FACE THE DEATH PENALTY, YET HE VOLUNTEERS AS A GUINEA PIG.
THE SECOND FELON IS KURIFU.
STILL, BECAUSE OF THAT, HE COOPERATES FULLY. A TRUE HELP.
OUR GREATEST HURDLE-- AMPUTATION AND RE-SUTURING WITHOUT ANESTHETIC-- HE APPEARS TO TAKE IT IN STRIDE.
FELICITOUS. IF KURIFU AND MANJI COOPERATE, I NEED ONLY RETRACE MY STEPS.
I SEE NO PROBLEMS... BUT ONE.

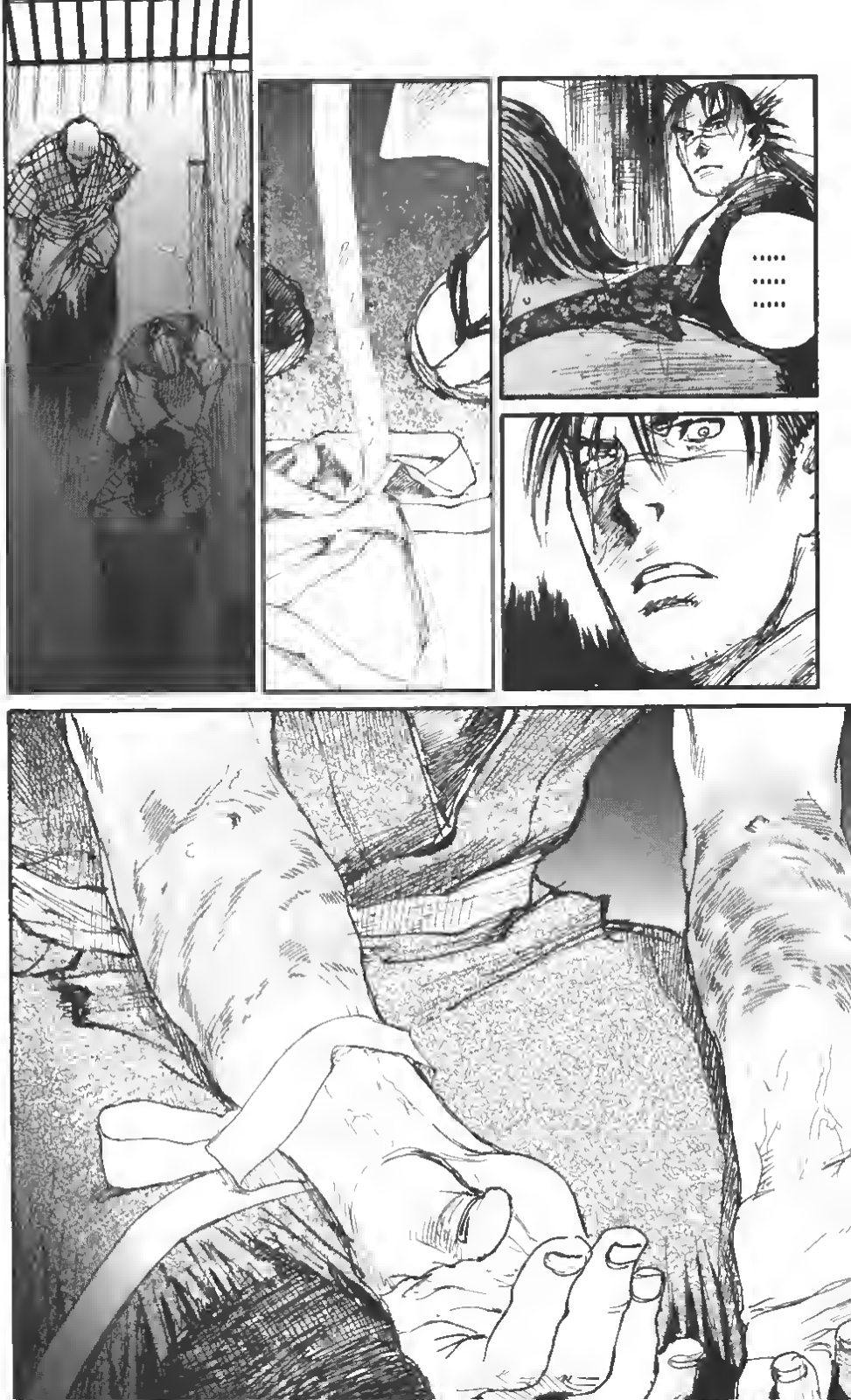
BOTH ARMS AT ONCE!
WITHIN THE HOUR, I REMOVE, SWITCH, AND REATTACH MANJI AND KURIFU'S LIMBS.
THERE IS METHOD IN THIS MADNESS.
MY LESSONS FROM DEWA-NOSUKE.
ONE, THIS PROCE-DURE...
...TAKES TOO MANY DAYS.

AND TWO, THE MORE DAYS PASS, THE MORE THE FELON DECLINES.
CONSEQUENTLY, I MUST BUY TIME, NO MATTER HOW EXTREME, ON THIS FIRST DAY WHEN HIS HEALTH IS PERFECT--OR HE WON'T LAST TO THE END.
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT? YOUR BODY...?
HEH HEH HEH...
ISN'T *HE* THE CARING ONE...
...THE DOC WHO WEIGHS LIVES AGAINST HIS *CAREER*.

RETURN TO THE BASICS!
TO THOSE DARK DAYS WHEN I COULDN'T EVEN SAVE MY OWN MOTHER... IF I ALWAYS REMEMBER THAT MORTIFICATION THEN... SOMEDAY!
FOUR DAYS LATER...


TRY MOVING YOUR FINGERS.
RIGHT... YEAH.
.....
.....
GOD, THAT TER-RIBLE DAY.
I PANICK-ED. I CAN'T DENY IT.
IT SHOULD BE EASY TO GET HIM AS FAR AS DEWA-NOSUKE.
IT'S WHAT COMES NEXT...
THIS TIME, NO MATTER WHAT HABAKI-DONO SAYS, I'LL TAKE TIME... ESPECIAL-LY...
?

SURELY THEY'LL MOVE MORE THAN THAT?
WHAT'S WRONG?
HRRK... NO...
DOC... I...
...I DON'T WANNA SAY IT...
...BUT THE SUR-GERY...?
YOU SURE YOU DIDN'T...
...SCREW IT UP?
WHAT?!
NOTHIN' ...DOC. THESE LAST TWO DAYS.
DON'T FEEL NOTHIN'...!



WHA--?!
WHAT THE--?! FUCK!
KAK
MY-- MY ARMS!!
GGU OHHH!
YOU IDIOT! SIT STILL!!
Nooo... !!
GRAK
DON'T--!

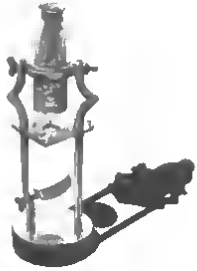
TO BE CONTINUED...!

NEXT MONTH:
ON THE PERFECTION OF ANATOMY, Part 5 of 6

The return of a major supporting character! Rin continues to live in her family's abandoned *dōjō*, fretting over Manji's absence and disturbed by Dōa and Isaku. A surprise visit provides some relief, and Rin sets out to search for her missing friends, starting with Giichi. This fan-favorite bald-and-bespectacled warrior has been missing for a while. After the death of his son and the dissolution of the Mugai-*ryū*, does Giichi even want to be found? Meanwhile, in a horrible prison under Edo castle, Doc Burando continues to write his medical opus, *On the Perfection of Anatomy*, and several more unlucky convicts become unwilling participants in the demented doctor's experiments.

This issue also features the return of Hiroaki Samura's absurd and hilarious "Biography," with rare, accompanying pinups by Samura-*dono* himself!

無限の住人



GLOSSARY

Bangashira Head of the *banshū*

Banshū Officers serving under the shogun, usually assigned to Edo Castle to defend the shogun himself.

Dōjo A school for combat and self-defense training in martial arts, here, a training center for swordsmanship

Dono Archaic honorific used to show respect, usually for someone of higher rank

Edo Capitol of pre-modern Japan. Later renamed Tokyo.

Fusama Sliding doors between rooms, made of wood and rice paper.

Itto-ryū The radical sword school of Anotsu Kagehisa.

Kaizō Shigi Ayame Burando's journal. He is writing *On the Perfection of Anatomy*, a record of his medical experiments.

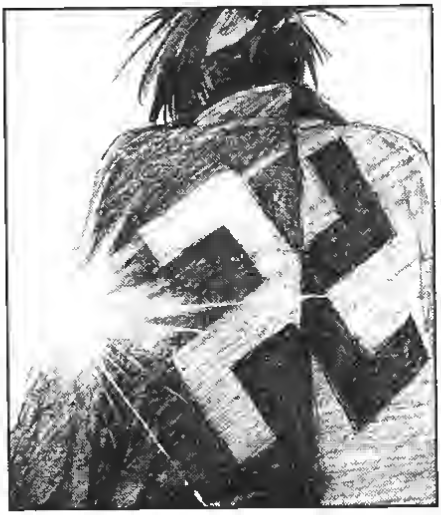
Kessen-chu The "sacred bloodworms." A person infected by them cannot die but feels pain like a mortal.

Mutenichi-ryū The sword school led by Rin's father (now deceased), destroyed by Anotsu Kagehisa

Ryu A sword school.

Toshū Leader, master.

Yamada Asaemon Nicknamed Kubikiri Asa, the shogun's executioner was a master swordsman, sword tester, and an expert at beheading and cutting human bodies.



ABOUT THE SWASTIKA

The main character in *Blade of the Immortal*, Manji, has taken the "crux gammata," as both his name and his personal symbol. This symbol is also known as the *swastika*, a name derived from the Sanskrit *svastika* (meaning "welfare," from *su*—"well" + *asti*—"he is"). As a symbol of prosperity and good fortune, the *swastika* was widely used throughout the ancient world (for example, appearing often on Mesopotamian coinage), including North and South America and has been used in Japan as a symbol of Buddhism since ancient times. To be precise, the symbol generally used by Japanese Buddhists is the *sauvastika*, which moves in a counterclockwise direction, and is called the *manji* in Japanese. The *sauvastika* generally stands for night, and often for magical practices. The *swastika*, whose arms point in a clockwise direction, is generally considered a solar symbol. It was this version (the *hakenkreuz*) that was perverted by the Nazis. It is important that readers understand that the *swastika* has ancient and honorable origins, and it is those that apply to this story, which takes place in the 18th century (ca. 1782-3). *There is no anti-Semitic or pro-Nazi meaning behind the use of the symbol in this story. Those meanings did not exist until after 1910.*

ABOUT THE TRANSLATION

The Artwork The author of *Blade of the Immortal* requested that we make an effort to avoid mirror-imaging his artwork. Some manga are first copied in a mirror-image in order to facilitate the left to right reading of the pages. However, Mr. Samura decided that he would rather see his pages reversed via the technique of cutting up the panels and repasting them in reverse order. While we feel that this often leads to problems in panel-to-panel continuity, we place primary importance on the wishes of the creator. Therefore, most of *Blade of the Immortal* has been produced using the "cut and paste" technique. There are, of course, some sequences where it was impossible to do this, and mirror-imaged panels or pages were used instead.

The Sound Effects & Dialogue Since some of Mr. Samura's sound effects are integral parts of the artwork, the decision was made to leave those in their original Japanese. When it was crucial to the understanding of the panel that the sound effect be in English, however, Mr. Samura chose to redraw the panel. We hope readers will view the un-retouched sound effects as essential portions of Mr. Samura's extraordinary artwork. In addition, Mr. Samura's treatment of dialogue is quite different from that featured in average samurai manga and is considered to be one of the things that has made *Blade* such a huge hit in Japan. Mr. Samura has mixed a variety of linguistic styles in this fantasy story, where some characters speak in the mannered style of old Japan, while others speak as if they were street-corner punks from a bad area of modern day Tokyo. The anachronistic slang used by some of the characters in the English translation reflects the unusual mix of speech patterns from the original Japanese text.

LETTERS

Send letters and fan art to:

BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL, c/o DARK HORSE COMICS,
10956 SE MAIN STREET, MILWAUKIE, OREGON 97222

www.darkhorse.com • blade@darkhorse.com

All fan artwork, letters, and e-mails submitted
become the property of Dark Horse Comics

Just a short note this month, thanking *Blade of the Immortal* fans and contributors Dan Hipp and Jhomar Soriano. Dan is our back cover pinup artist, and he's currently drawing *The Amazing Joy Buzzards*. There will be two dynamic *TAJB* collections out by the time you read this, and you should visit his fun website at mrhipp.com. This is Jhomar's fifth *Rumble* strip for us, and he'll be sending in more strips for future issues. And thank YOU for reading every month! –Philip S.

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Manji

pinup by Dan Hipp

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KRYPTONIA-DGP